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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRATISLAVA 000550

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MASS](#) [KPAO](#) [MOPS](#) [IZ](#) [LO](#)

SUBJECT: PARLIAMENTARY FOREIGN AFFAIRS CHAIRMAN THINKS
GOVERNMENT COULD TAKE MONTHS TO FINALIZE DECISION ON
POSSIBLE IRAQ WITHDRAWAL

REF: BRATISLAVA 544

Classified By: Lawrence R. Silverman, Charge d'Affaires, a.i., for reasons 1.4 (b) (d).

¶1. (C) We pass along the following not as a definitive state of play in the Fico government's thinking on a withdrawal from Iraq (which is not clear yet--), but as an indication of the internal debate that has been joined since he took power (reftel). Ruling Smer Party MP and newly-appointed Chairman of Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee Boris Zala told Charge July 8 that he thought a decision on a possible withdrawal of troops from Iraq could take a few months. He said he is recommending to PM Fico that the GOS take its time and consult closely with the U.S. When CDA said it was equally important to consult with the Iraqi government, Zala, who opposed the Iraq intervention and who is not generally favorably-disposed to U.S. Administration policy, readily agreed. Zala cited his recent discussion with the Slovak Armed Forces hierarchy, who stressed the valuable experience Slovak soldiers were gaining in Iraq. Zala also acknowledged that Slovakia's international reputation has benefitted from the willingness to send troops. CDA took the opportunity to stress to Zala that even if Slovakia decided to begin a drawdown of troops, it should offer new training opportunities in Iraq, rather than in Slovakia. Zala took this on board.

¶2. (U) Later July 8, CDA taped a Slovak radio interview on the subject of the possible withdrawal, for airing July 9 during a talk program that will include Defense Minister Kasicky; an MP from Fico coalition partner HZDS Party (HZDS, though a coalition partner, opposes a withdrawal); and foreign policy advisor to former PM Dzurinda Milan Jezovica, who will also oppose a withdrawal. In the interview, CDA stressed that now was not the time for Slovak troops to leave and that there should be close consultation with both the USG and the Iraqi government. CDA also emphasized that we hoped to have the same level of cooperation from the new government as we did with the Dzurinda government, in support of transformational diplomacy, strong transatlantic relations, and promotion of human rights and transparency. Slovakia's responsibilities derive from its membership in the EU, NATO and now, the UNSC; those did not change with the change in government. (Comment: To date, the Slovak press is taking a very professional approach to covering this topic.)

¶3. (U) The next opportunity to engage the government on the Iraq subject and others will be July 10, during Foreign Minister Jan Kubis's introductory meeting with the diplomatic corps, and a bilateral meeting with the Ambassador July 12.

